

if this is love by GhostGrantaire

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Summary:

Steve gets kicked out of his house and becomes an honorary Wheeler

if this is love

Author's Note:

This is much longer than I'd anticipated, but I'm very excited about finishing something again. Also, this is written before season 2, and it's not meant to really infer anything about season 2. Just know that Eleven's back, and... that's it.

Also this is based off of the Freaks & Geeks episode "Smooching and Mooching"

Enjoy!

"Is your brother still sleeping in the basement?" Steve said in greeting as soon as he sat down across from Nancy.

Nancy frowned, swallowing her bite of sandwich before responding. "Um, not so much since El came back. Why?"

Jonathan appeared, setting his tray beside hers and she gave him a small smile before looking back at her boyfriend, who was frowning thoughtfully.

"So that pull-out couch down there is up for grabs?" He continued, and Nancy suddenly guessed where this was going.

"You can't stay with me, Steve. My mother would have a conniption fit." Nancy bit into a strawberry, shaking her head firmly.

Steve's shoulders slumped, and he gave a long drawn-out sigh.

"You could've spent another night on my couch if you hadn't screwed up yesterday," Jonathan mumbled from behind his sandwich. Steve threw him a dirty look, but Nancy just frowned.

"What?" She asked, looking back and forth between them. "What'd you do?"

It wasn't unreasonable to be curious. The Byers' were the most open

people on earth– if Joyce Byers ever turned anyone away, there had to be a damn good reason.

“Nothing,” Steve said immediately. Jonathan snorted.

“You can’t leave condoms lying around for my brother to find. He’s thirteen,” Jonathan pointed out, shaking his head in amusement.

Steve threw up his hands in the air in exclamation, but Nancy could only blush, throwing him a look. “They weren’t lying around, they fell out of my backpack! It’s not my fault your mom and brother took that moment to clean off the couch.”

“Steve,” Nancy said sternly, drawing out the name. He looked at her guiltily, grimacing slightly.

“Come on, would you rather I not have them?” He pointed out with raised eyebrows. Nancy groaned and kicked at him, feeling her face darken again in embarrassment.

“It’s not that big of a deal, I bet that kid knows more than you think,” Steve continued. He gave Jonathan a pointed look. “Stop acting so holier-than-thou, I’ve seen what you’ve got in your nightstand.”

Jonathan’s face darkened so quickly it would have been comedic if Nancy wasn’t still embarrassed about the entire conversation. Jonathan looked at his food, mumbling under his breath.

“In the drawer, Steve, there’s a fucking difference,” he grumbled, ears red against his light hair. “Besides, none of this changes the fact that you basically forced my mom into giving Will a talk she wasn’t planning to give for at least a few years.”

“Well where am I supposed to sleep now?” Steve asked desperately.

“Can’t you just go home?” Nancy asked, rolling her eyes subtly. She loved Steve with her whole heart, but he was probably the most dramatic person she’d ever met, her brother being a close second.

Steve raised his eyebrows. “My dad kicked me out, remember?”

“He didn’t kick you out,” Nancy mumbled quietly, but Steve picked

up on it.

“He threw my all records out the window! And he ripped at the sheets off my bed and threw them down the stairs. Does that seem like a normal thing to do to you?” Steve cried with raised eyebrows.

Nancy sighed. “No, of course not. I just...”

She faded off, not wanting to admit that she thought Steve was maybe making too big of a deal out of the fight with his dad. She knew Steve never got on well with his dad, and he wasn’t exactly unbiased when it came to his parents.

“What are you gonna do?” Jonathan asked, looking slightly sympathetic. She was relieved he’d spoken up and taken the pressure off her.

Steve shrugged, taking a sip of the boxed milk in front of him. “I’ll find something. I can sleep in my car if nothing else.”

Nancy frowned, feeling suddenly very guilty about the whole thing. She didn’t like the idea of Steve sleeping out in the streets, but what could she do about it really? She hadn’t been lying– her mom would freak out if she asked for her boyfriend to spend the night.

Her unease must’ve shown on her face because Steve soon caught her eye and smiled. “Hey, I’ll be fine. I’ve got friends all over this school, remember?”

Nancy bit her lip, her eyes flickering to meet Jonathan’s shortly before they dropped to her sandwich. While Steve’s statement wasn’t exactly incorrect, his “friends” were more of the sit-next-to-each-other-at-a-football-game-once-in-a-while type, not the my-dad-kicked-me-out-of-the-house-can-I-sleep-on-your-floor type.

“Alright,” Nancy said. There was a silence before she looked up at them. “How’d you feel about that English quiz, Jonathan?”

Maybe it was foolish of her, but Nancy didn’t think about the

conversation again until that night at dinner when a knock at the door interrupted her and Mike's usual argument about if mashed potatoes were better with or without skin. Her dad excused himself, grumbling about solicitors at dinner.

"Hi Mr. Wheeler!"

Nancy froze, fork in hand, as her boyfriend's voice rang out from the front door. Her mother shot her an inquisitive glance but she just shrugged, turning her head to listen.

"Is, uh, is Nancy here?" Steve continued after a curt hello from her father.

"She's eating dinner," her dad explained shortly, and Nancy could hear the unspoken dismissal behind that. Steve either didn't get the message or didn't care.

"Oh yeah," Steve said with a small forced laugh. "I can smell all the... food. Smells good."

Nancy grimaced as both her mom and her brother shot her odd glances, and she finally pushed her chair back from the table and walked over to the door. Her dad glanced at her sternly, and she felt embarrassed as she walked around to see Steve.

"Nancy!" Steve exclaimed, looking happy but not at all surprised. "Fancy seeing you here."

"It's my house, Steve," Nancy replied, raising her eyebrows and crossing her arms.

Steve nodded, not seeming to have actually heard her. Nancy blinked as her mom came up behind her. Great, she thought, let's just get the whole family over here.

"Oh, hello there Steve," Karen greeted politely, and Steve's smile widened.

"Hi Mrs. Wheeler! I was just saying, the food smells amazing. Did you make it?" He asked, voice unusually bright. Nancy didn't like that voice. It usually meant Steve was about to confess something bad or

do something stupid.

“Yes, thank you,” Karen replied simply. There was a long moment of silence as the four of them stood there, Steve on the other side of the door. Nancy wasn’t quite sure what she was waiting for, but eventually the spell was broken by her mother.

“Would you like to stay for dinner, Steve?”

Everyone looked at her, Ted in resignation, Nancy in surprise, and Steve in pure joy.

“I’d love! Thanks Mrs. Wheeler!” He exclaimed as he made his way inside. Nancy’s parents nodded with polite smiles and made their way back to the dining room.

“Wow, this worked out well,” Steve said happily as he followed. Nancy threw him a pained look, but he didn’t see it, so she simply rolled her eyes and shut the door behind him.

Nancy saw Mike give Steve a suspicious look when he walked in the other room. He didn’t actually dislike Steve anymore– thank God, because those days had not been easy on her– but he still was wary of him in general.

There was a strange pause when they all sat down after Karen grabbed an extra plate setting, the only noise coming from Holly’s muttering (every since she’d become more comfortable in speech she’d just started talking nonsense constantly, adding to the eternal racket that made up the house’s ambience).

Steve ended up breaking the silence.

“Are those mashed potatoes?!” He asked happily, reaching for the plate and scooping some onto his own plate.

After that dinner flowed rather well. Steve had never been much of a “dinner with the folks” kind of boyfriend, but it turned out she had nothing to worry about. Steve was charismatic enough that he didn’t allow for awkward pauses, and her family was polite enough to make it work.

“How has, um... swim team been, Steve?” Karen asked eventually, looking over curiously.

Steve blinked thoughtfully for a moment before shrugging. “Okay,” he started. “Today was rough though. My back was totally sore so it really threw off my stroke.”

“Really?” Nancy asked. She hadn’t seen any sign of that today.

He nodded, glancing at her before looking back at her mother. “Yeah, I mean that’s what happens when you sleep on a couch.”

Nancy paused, setting her water back down to look at him with wide eyes, suddenly having a terrible feeling about this conversation.

“The couch?” Ted asked through a mouthful of food. Karen looked at him in reprimand before frowning over at Steve.

“Yeah,” Steve answered casually. “Not to mention that couch is like ten years old so it’s not that comfortable. No offense to the Byers though, it’s not their fault. It’s not meant for sleeping.”

Nancy gave a tiny whine from the back of her throat, bringing her hands up to shield her eyes from anyone else’s gaze. She couldn’t believe he was doing this.

“Why are you sleeping on Joyce’s couch?” Karen asked slowly, taking another bite of her pasta.

“Well, was, I’m not sleeping there anymore. But...” he paused, taking a long breath, and Nancy wanted to kick him. Steve was a pretty damn good actor when he wanted to be, something he’d inherited from his parents’ careers of lying. “You see my dad, he sorta kicked me out.”

“He didn’t kick you out,” Nancy grumbled, reiterating her words from earlier that day, but nobody seemed to care.

“Why would he do that?” Karen asked. Immediately after asking the question, she looked slightly regretful, like she wasn’t sure if she should be so nosy.

Steve shrugged, eyes going surprisingly genuine for a moment. Nancy felt a moment of guilt, wondering if Steve really wasn't yet over what had happened. "We just got into a bad fight."

Nancy waited for the rest of the story. She hadn't even heard all the details. Something about grades, character, iffy choices of friends (though Steve had seemed to glide past that point quickly when relaying the story, his eyes flickering unsurely to Jonathan through the whole part).

But Steve didn't delve into the details. The Wheelers stayed quiet, waiting for more, and it wasn't until it was clear that Steve was done talking that they moved on.

"When did this happen?" Ted asked slowly, eyes flickering towards Nancy. She could feel Mike giving her a weird look too, but she ignored them, keeping her eyes on her boyfriend.

"A couple nights ago," Steve said with a shrug. His eyes were fixed on his food, but everyone else was staring at him. Even Holly was looking at him, though she seemed more enamored with his hair than anything else. "The Byers let me crash for a bit, but you know, they've all got other stuff to deal with."

Nancy stared at him with parted lips, unable to believe all the cards Steve was pulling in that moment. She wanted to call him out, reveal the actual reason he wasn't spending a fourth night on the Byers' couch, but she felt like that might be a bit over the top, not to mention, it would create a world of trouble for her too.

"But hey, at least I've got a nice car, right?" Steve said happily, looking up from his food. "The backseat isn't all that uncomfortable. I've just got to find a sleeping bag or something."

"You're gonna sleep in your car?" Mike asked, voice disbelieving and disgusted.

"There's supposed to be a cold front tonight," Karen said, voice full of worry. "That doesn't seem safe."

Steve frowned, and Nancy couldn't tell if that really hadn't occurred

to him, or if he was just that good at pretending. “Oh. Well, I don’t really have any other options.”

There was another long pause, and Nancy bit her lip hard. *Someone change the subject, change the subject, come on, please—*

Her mother, forever predictable, broke the silence yet again. “Well...”

“No way.” Jonathan stared at Steve, something nothing quite surprise on his face... it was almost awe, as if he couldn’t believe all the shit Steve actually managed to pull off.

“Yep,” Steve assured him, mouth full of goldfish that definitely came from her house. “I mean, I’m just sleeping in the basement, but still. The Wheelers are like... the nicest people in the world.”

Nancy scoffed at that, picking at her pudding absentmindedly. Jonathan redirected his attention to her, a suspicious look on her face.

“Your parents were seriously okay with it?” He asked. “I mean, even after all Sunglasses Incident?”

The Sunglasses Incident, aka the time Ted found a pair of Steve’s sunglasses on the roof by Nancy’s window while cleaning the gutter, and her parents had interrogated her for an entire afternoon about why any of Steve’s personal belongings would be found on the roof of her house. Nancy shuddered just thinking about it.

“Yeah, I guess so,” Nancy said with a shrug.

“Man I wish my parents were as cool as yours, Nancy,” Steve threw out, shaking his head.

Nancy rolled her eyes. “They’re really not cool. They just pitied you.”

“No, they’re totally cool,” Steve argued. He looked towards Jonathan. “Ted showed me all of his vinyls after dinner, it was insane. Have you seen them?”

“No...” Jonathan started unsurely.

“*Ted?*” Nancy asked in disbelief, speaking over their friend.

Steve ignored her. “And then we talked baseball, and you know, for an old guy, he knows surprisingly a lot about the Cardinals. He even mentioned going to a game sometime.”

Nancy stabbed at her vegetables in annoyance. She didn’t know what it was, but something about her dad asking her boyfriend to go to a baseball game when he’d never once asked her... not that Nancy actually wanted to go to a baseball game, but still. It was just weird. “You’ve gone to games before. Why is that exciting to you?”

Steve looked at her, a slow smirk forming on his face. “You see, Nancy, each game is actually different from the others—”

He stopped talking when Nancy flicked a carrot at his head and laughed at the expression on his face.

Despite some of the weirdness, by the second day, Nancy had decided she had been overly dramatic about the whole thing. Honestly, Steve fit in at her house. It was nice having him around, nice getting rides to and from school every day, nice to be able to watch a movie with her boyfriend without having to come up with some lie about where she really was.

“I’m just gonna say it,” Steve finally said, not taking his eyes off the television. “This sucks.”

“Yeah it does,” Nancy agreed, frowning at the screen. “Who’s idea was it to make a sequel to Grease?”

“I don’t know but I kinda want to punch them in the face,” Steve deadpanned, making Nancy laugh. Steve broke into a wide smile too and before they knew it they were giggling messes on the couch.

Mike grimaced at them when he walked through the door, their mother close behind him.

“You guys are gross,” he said before running up the stairs to his room.

Karen raised her eyebrows at them, grocery bags hanging from her arms. Nancy sat up from where she was leaning against Steve and paused the VHS.

“Did you get your homework done yet?” Karen asked as she made her way to the kitchen. Nancy followed her and Steve came along as well, taking a seat at the table.

“Almost,” Nancy answered back obediently, helping her mother unpack the bags. “I’ve got two chapters of Faulkner to read tonight.”

Her mother nodded and Nancy watched as her eyes darted to Steve, who wasn’t paying much attention to anything besides the back of the cereal box. “Steve? What about you?”

Steve looked up, blinking between them. “Huh?”

“No TV until all your homework’s done, that’s the rule,” her mother explained. Nancy frowned– that was the rule for the family, not guests. She wasn’t quite sure what her mother was getting at. She almost expected Steve to argue or scoff, but when he eventually nodded, Nancy spotted the hint of a smile on his lips.

“Okay,” he said. He was definitely smiling then, and Nancy wasn’t quite sure what it meant. He looked up at her before she could question him. “Wanna help, Nance?”

Nancy rolled her eyes, smiling softly at him. “You’re past help, Steve. But I’ll sit next to you and point out everything you get wrong.”

“Best girlfriend ever,” Steve teased.

“Here, take some snacks to the dining room,” Karen offered, handing over a couple Fruit Roll-ups and a small plate of strawberries.

“You’re the best, Mrs. Wheeler!” Steve said with a grin, grabbing the food.

“It’s Karen,” she corrected firmly, and Nancy smiled as she saw

Steve's grin widen further.

The next morning, Nancy walked down the stairs with her brother to the sound of voices in the kitchen.

"...then I told Gloria that there wasn't any way for me to fix all her problems with the band because I obviously wasn't qualified since I was just on chair duty--"

Nancy and Mike made their way into the kitchen, frowning at the pair inside. Her mother was speaking animatedly and sarcastically as she continued making fruit salad, and Steve was laughing excitedly as he listened to the story. Nancy traded a disbelieving look with her brother, who looked almost grossed out at the idea of someone actually laughing at their mom's stories.

She blinked at Steve. It was Saturday, a day which meant no school and no church, therefore no reason to look good in the morning. Nancy loved Saturdays, coming down in her pajamas and ratty hair and face completely void of makeup. Even Mike was wearing his old dinosaur pajamas, and his hair was completely sticking up in the back.

Steve didn't seem to have gotten the memo about Saturdays, though, because he still looked as effortlessly handsome as he always did, eyes bright and hair absolutely perfect. For some reason it made Nancy mad just looking at him.

Steve grinned back at her, eyes dropping down to her outfit. She was wearing her more casual pajamas, a grey T-shirt with Daffy Duck printed on the front. She crossed her arms and frowned when Steve chuckled at her.

"Oh there you both are," Karen said, interrupting her own story. Nancy watched as Steve grabbed a few strawberries and popped them into his mouth, something that Nancy would surely be scolded harshly for. Karen barely even batted an eyelash. "Go on and set the table for breakfast."

Mike groaned. "Why can't Steve do it? He's been up this whole time."

"Mike, don't argue with me," Karen scolded. "I asked you to set the table, go set the table."

Mike huffed and grabbed the plates and napkins, and Nancy took a moment to grab enough silverware and glasses before they walked to the dining room.

"I can't believe Steve wants to listen to Mom's PTA stories," Mike grumbled as he placed the plates down. Nancy hummed, unable to argue.

They worked in silence for a moment until a loud ring of laughter rang out from the kitchen. Nancy and Mike looked at each other again before moving to peek inside. Their father had come into the kitchen as well, his arm wrapped around his wife's waist as Steve leaned against the counter and the three of them laughed loudly at something.

"Damn," Mike whispered, disgust in his voice. "Is Steve like, in love with Mom and Dad?"

Nancy groaned and wished she had an easier time responding to that.

After that, Nancy began to discover more and more about what it really meant to have Steve live with them.

"Oh my god, Nancy," Steve said through laughs Sunday evening in the living room. Nancy frowned, rushing over to see what he was looking at. "You were so chubby!"

Nancy's face flushed bright red as she looked down at the baby pictures Steve was holding in the photo album. She stared with wide eyes at her younger self, covered in baby rolls and flouncing around in baby dresses that didn't quite fit. "What- where did you get this?"

"Your mom gave it to me," Steve chuckled, turning a page. Nancy whimpered as she saw her three year old self holding baby-Mike in a

sort of chokehold. Steve laughed even harder.

“Oh come on, don’t look at those,” she pleaded just as her mom walked into the room.

“Nancy, don’t be so sensitive,” Karen admonished. “It’s just fun. You were a beautiful baby anyway.”

“Yep,” Steve agreed, throwing her a teasing grin. “Absolutely adorable.”

Nancy gave them both dirty glares. After a second she decided to leave to the basement, ignoring the quiet chuckles that followed her.

Mike, Lucas, and Dustin were sitting around a table, cards out in front of them. They’d postponed their latest campaign since Will had come down with a bad cold, so Nancy wasn’t sure what it was exactly they were playing.

“How’s it going down here?” Nancy asked, throwing herself on one of the couches.

“Oh... hey Nancy,” Lucas said slowly.

“Why aren’t you hanging out with your boyfriend?” Dustin asked, and Mike and Lucas both threw him looks.

“What, I can’t hang out with my brother and his friends sometimes?” Nancy threw back.

“You never have before,” Lucas mumbled under his breath, but Nancy pretended not to hear.

“So, what are you guys playing?”

“Are you mad that Steve’s living here?” Mike asked her the next morning as they took out the trash. She looked at him sternly.

“He’s not living here. He’s just spending the night.” She huffed as she

dragged the bag behind her.

“It’s been a lot of nights,” Mike commented in that voice of his that was full of implications.

“I’m not mad,” Nancy explained shortly. She used two hands to haul the trash bag into the bin as Mike held the lid open. “It’s just... weird having him around all the time.”

“He’s your boyfriend. Don’t you want him around all the time?” Mike asked, and she heard genuine curiosity in his voice.

Nancy laughed shortly as she closed the lid and began pulling the bin to the curb. “No way. Nobody wants their boyfriend around all the time.”

Mike followed her like a puppy that had nowhere better to be. “But in the movies it’s like people can’t get enough of each other.”

“Yeah, in the movies maybe,” Nancy explained. She was getting a bit annoyed at the questions, but she knew Mike was just being curious. “It’s not like that in real life. Maybe in the beginning, but everyone needs their space eventually. It doesn’t mean I don’t love him.”

“You love him?” Mike asked, his voice filled with shock. Nancy glanced back and saw that he’d stopped walking. She left the trash can by the road and wiped off her hands on her pants, frowning.

“Yeah, I think so,” she answered, giving a small shrug.

Mike nodded thoughtfully before smirking at her slightly. “Well he definitely loves you. He thinks you’re way cooler than you really are.”

Nancy laughed and shoved Mike roughly, beginning to walk back to the house. “Shut up, loser.”

They made their way through the garage, still laughing slightly when Nancy spoke up. “Are you okay with him staying here?”

Mike shrugged indifferently. “Yeah, it’s pretty okay. Although I can hear him singing in the shower in the morning. And he takes forever

in the bathroom in the mornings. Did you know how long it takes him to style his hair?! I mean, why does he ever care that much? He already has a girlfriend.”

Nancy laughed, ruffling her younger brother’s hair. “Never change, Mikey.”

Nancy ground her teeth together as she listened to Steve laugh with her dad from the other room, Holly giggling along. She stared aggressively at her textbook, trying to ignore the sounds.

“Still working?” Steve asked about twenty minutes later, strolling into the dining room and looking over her shoulder at the book. “Damn, can’t believe I finished before you.”

“You have like half the workload as I do, Steve,” Nancy threw back, not looking up at him.

If Steve heard the bite behind the words, he didn’t comment, sitting across from her with a smile.

“You know, your parents are—”

“The greatest people in the world, and we’re the perfect family and I’m the luckiest person on earth,” Nancy finished sharply. She looked up at Steve, who had his head tilted to the side. “Yeah, I got that. Thanks.”

There was a moment of silence.

“You okay?” Steve asked unsurely.

Nancy exhaled and closed her eyes for a moment. Stop being selfish and dramatic. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just stressed.”

“Maybe we could watch a movie this weekend,” Steve offered, cocking his head to the side. It was familiar to her and she found herself smiling. Maybe a date with Steve would make this better. She hadn’t been actually alone with him in a while. Maybe she just

needed to remember their dynamic when it was just the two of them.

“Yeah, I’d like that,” she answered honestly. “What’s playing?”

Steve paused thoughtfully. “Honestly, nothing good.” He frowned before brightening.

“Hey, what if we just watch something here? We could get an actually good movie, make popcorn and hot chocolate and everything. We could even make it like a family movie night or something!”

Nancy blinked at him, smile dropping off of her face. Was he serious?

“...Yeah. Look, I’m gonna go to the library. I remembered I have to grab a book.” It was a flimsy excuse at best, but she didn’t care.

She closed her binder and tucked it into her backpack. As soon as she’d said it, she knew it was what she needed to do. She felt like she’d crumble spending another moment in this house.

She made her way out of the dining room, and Steve called after her.

“Do you want a ride?” He called, but she was already closing the door behind her and heading towards the garage.

She hadn’t needed to ride her bike in a long time. Steve or Jonathan drove her around constantly, and before that, Barb had. She was honestly amazed there was still air in her tires, and she had a feeling her dad had probably aired them up on accident some time previously. She was a bit shaky at first, but after a couple of minutes she settled into it, riding comfortably down the streets.

The quiet, mixed only with the sound of wind against her ears, gave her some much needed time to think.

The thing was, none of this was up to her. She knew that in theory she could ask Steve to leave, explain to him that he was getting on her nerves for no reason at all, and in theory he probably would. But there was no way Nancy could actually just kick her boyfriend to the metaphorical (and literal) curb just so she could have a bit of peace and quiet. The idea of making Steve sleep in his car while they had a

perfectly good couch available was repulsive to her.

She'd struggle through, if she had to. After a while, Steve would come to his senses and go home.

As it turned out, that line of thought didn't comfort her for long. She quickly realized the absurdity behind it. It took a lot (usually a few well-aimed punches and an otherworldly monster) to get Steve Harrington to come to his senses.

But it was Tuesday, and Nancy had decided she wasn't going to worry about it. Tuesday mornings were some of Nancy's favorites. She had an off period in the morning, and more often than not Jonathan would skip his first period history since they always watched documentaries on Tuesdays. Currently they were hanging out at a picnic table a fair ways away from the main school, sitting shoulder to shoulder comfortably.

"How's domestic life with Steve?" Jonathan asked and looked at her. There was something in his eyes that made Nancy feel like he already knew the answer.

She huffed, rolling her eyes irritably.

"I love him, okay," she started, needing to get it out of the way. It was true, after all. "But... I swear to God, I can't have him in my house anymore. I'm think I'm going insane."

Jonathan gave her a pitiful look. She felt bad for saying all of this stuff, but she didn't have anyone else to rant to, and keeping it all in was making everything so much worse.

"He and my mom are like... friends or something. They basically gossip together every single day. And he's always giving Mike advice about his friends and El, and it's nice, I guess, and I like that they get along now, it's just... strange. And he's turned into one of Holly's favorite people, and he laughs at my dad's joke, and it's just weird, you know? I mean, he used to be scared of my parents. He hated coming over if he couldn't sneak in through the window. But now

he's like. Part of the family."

She made a face at that. Jonathan hummed thoughtfully beside her.

"Maybe that's what he needs, you know," he tripped over the words unsurely. Nancy gave him a surprised look. She knew Jonathan was insightful, but he didn't tend to apply that thoughtfulness to Steve. "I mean, he's an only child and stuff. You always talk about how lonely he is."

Nancy groaned. "I know, I know. I just. Why does he have to get that from my family? It's like, why are his parents such pieces of shit that he doesn't even know what it's like to have a home?"

Jonathan shrugged. "It sucks."

"I know I sound dramatic. I do know that. But he used to be my boyfriend. Now I feel like he's dating my whole family," she complained, giving a long suffering sigh.

Jonathan laughed at that, and Nancy couldn't help but join in. It did sound ridiculous, she supposed, but it also felt weirdly true.

Steve had always been her thing, something that was hers alone. She'd liked that from the start, used to years and years of sharing literally everything in her life with one of her siblings. Her parents hadn't even liked Steve all that much, but she hadn't cared. If anything, it'd made it more special. Now, that was all gone.

"You're not going to tell him I said that, are you?" She asked after a second of comfortable silence.

Jonathan raised his eyebrows at her. "I don't even talk to Steve that much, let alone to swap secrets."

Nancy smirked, narrowing her eyes at him teasingly. "You guys hang out. I know you're friends, even if you don't want to admit it. Hell, you let him sleep at your house for two whole nights."

"He's like a stray dog," Jonathan mumbled, though it wasn't very convincing. He looked surprised, like the fact that he was friends with Steve Harrington was a revelation to him. She laughed,

knocking their shoulders together.

“Admit it, Jonathan Byers. We soiled your reputation. You can’t be the friendless punk kid anymore. You’re just as mainstream as everyone else now.”

Jonathan ducked his head, a wide smile cutting over his face and she giggled at the sight.

“Nancy Wheeler, cutting class?” A teasing voice cut in, and Nancy gave a small sigh as she redirected to her boyfriend, raising her eyebrows. “Why I never...”

“You know perfectly well I have a free period, Steve.” She threw back. He grinned at her and sat down, casting a look at Jonathan.

“And where’s your hall pass, Mr. Byers?” Steve continued, and Jonathan rolled his eyes.

“You’re so full of shit, Harrington.” Jonathan drawled without missing a beat. Nancy allowed herself to break into a smile at their banter. This was what she was used to– the three of them, quiet, sarcastic, close. It made her feel better to hear. It was so different than the loud and uncharted territory that had become her own house.

The bell rang in the distance, signaling the beginning of the passing period, and Nancy sighed as she got to her feet.

“Hey, wanna hang at my place later today?” Jonathan threw out nervously as he dusted off his pants, looking at Steve with raised eyebrows. “Smoke or something?”

Steve looked surprised, like he always did when Jonathan extended an invitation, but shook his head after a moment. Nancy let out a disappointed breath and immediately felt bad for feeling disappointed. “I can’t. I promised Mike I’d start teaching him guitar tonight.”

“You’re what?” Nancy responded immediately, surprise laced through her voice. What the hell. “You don’t have to do that.”

“I volunteered,” Steve assured her happily, like that made it better. He looked back to Jonathan. “How about tomorrow?”

Jonathan nodded absently, but his eyes found Nancy again, full of strange sympathy. She shook her head imperceptibly, making sure Steve didn’t spot the movement.

“Walk you to class?” Steve offered. Nancy blinked, searching for an excuse to just have a few more moments of silence, but came up blank.

“Sure, sounds good,” she replied, voice lacking enthusiasm. “See you later, Jon.”

Apparently Steve really had volunteered to teach Mike guitar. Nancy had a feeling it had been Steve’s idea, another way to get the younger boy to completely warm up to him. Mike had a tendency to act like he still hated Steve, even though Nancy knew it wasn’t true.

Maybe it was wrong, but Nancy was almost sure that the lesson wouldn’t end well. Steve was a shitty teacher, and Mike was a shitty student. Nancy was almost looking forward to hearing the horror stories.

“Dude that was great!” Mike exclaimed as he darted up the stairs, Steve right behind him. They were both grinning, and Nancy couldn’t help but stare at them in surprise. “You’re like, really good.”

“What can I say, I’m basically a prodigy,” Steve joked. Mike rolled his eyes, but he was still grinning, like he thought Steve was funny rather than just weird, like he usually did.

“Thanks for the lesson, Steve,” Mike said happily before darting off to the kitchen.

Steve grinned at her, raising his eyebrows as if to say “did you hear that?” before sitting at the couch. She gave him an unsure smile before returning to her homework.

By eight o'clock, Nancy was getting restless with her homework. Steve had begun playing with Holly, speaking in soft but excited voices as they made up stories about her stuffed animals. Nancy couldn't focus at all.

"It's late. I should probably put Holly to bed—" Nancy started awkwardly, getting to her feet. Steve jumped up first, shaking his head.

"No, I can do it!" He assured her happily. "You need to study, don't worry about it."

Nancy stared at him as he picked up Holly, who eagerly wrapped her arms around his neck, squealing his name happily. She frowned at the sight. Holly didn't even like her that much. Granted, Nancy wasn't that great with kids, but it still hurt to know.

"Come on Princess," Steve said happily as he walked towards the girl's room. Nancy stared after them, eventually sitting back down.

"Your boyfriend's really cool." She startled at Mike's voice behind her, muffled through his mouth full of crackers. "I'm glad he's hanging out here."

Nancy looked back at him, pursing her lips. "Don't eat with you mouth full, it's disgusting," she said, at a loss for anything else to say. Mike just stuck his tongue, covered in crumbs, out at her, laughing when she gagged.

She didn't get any work done for the rest of the night, instead just staring at the papers, her stomach clenching uneasily.

She got the grade back for her math test three days later.

"It's just a B, Mom! It's not that big of a deal!" Nancy exclaimed, throwing her bag down on the table.

"Nancy, this isn't like you, you've always gotten A's in math—"

"Yeah well I'm sorry I messed up once, alright!" Nancy threw back. It wasn't like she didn't have a reason. Her study habits were all off now, ruined by her constant state of annoyance and guilt. "It's not a

big deal. It's not like I'm going to have to drop out of school or some shit."

"Language," Ted drawled from the couch, making Nancy grind her teeth together. Mike didn't seem concerned with the fight, continuing to play his video game, the sounds bouncing around the house loudly. Holly was crying in the corner, and Steve was just watching nervously from the couch. Everywhere she looked just gave her more reason to be upset, and she hated it.

"This is a very important time in your life, Nancy, your grades matter," Karen stressed. Nancy rolled her eyes. "Don't roll your eyes at me, Nancy!"

"Mom, it's one stupid grade. It doesn't matter—"

"Well what if it's not one grade?" Karen asked sharply. "Is this your new standard? I don't want you to stop working hard—"

"I do work hard!" Nancy yelled back. "I work hard every single day. Right Steve?"

She spun towards her boyfriend, who blinked like a deer in the headlights.

"Steve?" Nancy challenged, looking at him expectantly. Steve floundered, mouth opening and closing unsurely as his eyes flickered between her and her mom.

"Well, yeah, I mean—" he started, coughing slightly. "Your mom's just saying—"

"Are you fucking kidding me right now?" Nancy interrupted, and it was immediately followed by a loud chorus of "Language!" from both her parents. She didn't care. She glared at her boyfriend angrily. Steve stared back, looking rather scared.

"I can't believe you all," Nancy shouted, looking around at them. She felt a couple angry tears slip through her eyelashes. "This is completely ridiculous."

She didn't wait for a response, instead grabbing her bag and running

up the stairs. She heard someone follow her, and she felt her anger spike even higher.

Steve caught up with her in the hallway right in front of her room.

“Nancy, she just—”

“I swear to God, Steve.” Nancy spun towards him hotly. “If you tell me she just wants the best for me or some shit like that, I swear to God, I’m going to fucking—”

She found herself at a lack for words. She broke off and tried a different tactic.

“I can’t believe you’re taking her side on this,” she accused hotly, eyes filling with tears. “Just because you’re trying to be some perfect fucking son or something... she’s not even your mother! This isn’t even your family and you’re still worried about disappointing them. It’s pathetic.”

Steve went quiet, staring at her in complete surprise. Pushing her guilt aside, she used it as an opportunity to slip into her room, locking the door firmly behind her.

She was able to stay alone for hours. She ignored the sounds of dinner playing out downstairs, instead curling up in her bed and reading her book. She felt exhausted, her tears taking her energy out of her.

It was about eight o’clock when there was a gentle knock at her door.

“Nancy, darling?” Her mother’s voice rang out. “Open the door, sweetheart.”

Nancy sighed, taking a second to collect herself before she went and turned the lock. As soon as she had, she retreated back to her bed, pulling her knees to her chest as her mother stepped inside.

“I’m sorry if you felt like I was being unreasonable earlier,” Karen started. Her voice was gentle but determined. “But I’m only strict because I know how smart you are. I know how much you’re capable of, darling, and I don’t want you to give up on that.”

Nancy huffed, hugging her knees tighter. "You're just so much harder on me than you are on anyone else. It's like... no matter what I do, I can't make you proud of me."

Karen sighed, taking a seat on the bed beside her daughter. "Nancy, I'm always proud of you. And not just when it comes to grades. You've lived through a lot more than other kids your age have. I'm proud of you every single day for the person you've grown up to be."

Nancy felt tears tickle her eyes and she blinked hard.

"And when it comes to the others... Mike's still young, and he's still figuring everything out. So no, I don't hold him to the same standards, not yet at least."

"And Steve?" Nancy spat, somewhat bitterly. "You always act like he can't do anything wrong. He's not even your kid but it's like you like him more than me."

"Oh Nancy," Karen said softly, reaching out and grabbing her hand. "Nancy, Steve isn't my son. He won't be here forever. And honestly... I think he gets enough scolding and strict parenting at home. He doesn't need another set of parents doing the same thing."

Nancy huffed and turned her head to the side, feeling a few tears slip out of her eyes.

"You know, I've only ever met the Harrington's once, at a Christmas party. They're..." Karen paused, clearly searching for a word. She finally gave up, giving a small sigh. "They're hard people. Tough, sharp edges, you know. My parents were the same way. It wasn't easy for me, and I know it's not easy for Steve."

Nancy huffed, shaking her head. "I know the feeling," she muttered.

Her mother didn't snap like she'd expected. Instead she just cast a sad glance to Nancy, shaking her head gently. "Nancy darling, trust me. You don't."

Nancy found she didn't have anything to say to that.

Nancy didn't know what to do. She was still angry at Steve, angry at his constant presence, angry at the fact that he hadn't taken her side in that fight, angry that so much had changed between them.

But the worst part of it was that she knew her anger was completely misplaced. Sure Steve could be annoying sometimes, and he had made some stupid mistakes the past week, but all he was doing was trying to be part of her family. Her mother had been right— he didn't get this at home. And that wasn't fair.

She didn't know how to apologize to him for snapping. She spent the entire next day in turmoil, barely speaking with him. She knew she needed to swallow her pride and just talk with him, but she didn't even know where to begin.

As it turned out, she didn't need to. Jonathan dropped her off at home after school, and she found Steve waiting in the dining room. He looked up when she walked in, eyes wide.

"Hey," he greeted, giving a small smile. She returned it shakily.

"Hey," she repeated, setting her bag down on the table. There was a small pause as Nancy searched for words.

"I'm really sorry about yesterday," Steve started, and it made Nancy's stomach turn. She hated this. She hated that he was apologizing for something that was honestly her fault. "I should've taken your side, you didn't do anything wrong, and I'm really sorry."

"I know, Steve," Nancy said quietly. She didn't look at him. "I'm sorry too."

She saw him nod from the corner of her eye. "I... can we talk, maybe?"

She glanced up to see him looking openly at her, eyes wide and genuine. She sighed but nodded, closing her book. "Let's go upstairs. My parents aren't here."

"So," Steve said, following her into her room. She closed her eyes as

she sat her stuff down, willing herself to stay patient. "Can we talk about why you're completely pissed at me?"

His voice was light and casual, but when she looked at him, there was some sense of unease in his eyes. Her mouth opened immediately to respond, but then she hesitated, taking a deep breath. She shook her head, looking at the floor.

"I'm not pissed at you."

"Bull, Nancy," Steve replied without missing a beat, and she felt her irritation flare up again. Despite how badly she wanted to stay reasonable, she just kept feeling irritated. "Haven't we established that you and your family are all shit liars?"

She took another deep breath, meeting his eyes. "I'm not mad at you, because I have no reason to be."

She sat down on her bed and kicked off her shoes as she busied herself with pulling out her book. She'd wanted to try and give him her full attention, but at the moment that felt almost impossible. She needed a distraction.

Steve crossed his arms, looking at her strangely.

"You don't always need a reason to be upset," he pointed out. It sounded so logical it made her head spin, and she kept her eyes firmly on the text.

"Yes you do," Nancy argued back.

"Nancy," Steve started slowly, and she finally huffed and set the book aside.

"What do you want from me, Steve?" She asked, raising her eyebrows.

He blinked, probably at the anger in her voice, before frowning and pushing ahead. "Look, I'm not stupid, I know you're angry at me. You have been ever since I started staying here. Can you just tell me what I did?"

“You didn’t do anything!” Nancy exclaimed. “You didn’t do anything wrong, and that’s the whole fucking problem.”

“So yes, maybe it annoys the hell out of me that you’re always around, and you’re always talking to my family, and I can’t get one single night where you’re not there trying to impress my parents and be some perfect child or something. And maybe that really pisses me off sometimes, which isn’t fair at all because none of this is your fault, and maybe that pisses me off even more because I feel bad about the whole thing! I’m just– I’m angry that I’m not allowed to be angry at you!”

Nancy stopped talking, chest heaving as she tried to collect herself. Steve was staring back at her in completely shock, and there was more than a bit of hurt etched onto his face. A long stretch of silence hung in the air and Nancy slowly began filling with guilt.

“You should’ve told me,” Steve said after a second. His shoulders had fallen and he was staring at her despondently. “I– I didn’t want to upset you.”

“I know,” Nancy said immediately, closing her eyes. She hated this. She hated arguing with Steve, and she especially hated hurting him. “I didn’t mean– I just liked what we had, before. I’m not used to this. I miss just being your girlfriend and you being my boyfriend and it was good and it was just... it was just us.”

Steve nodded slowly. He looked around the room, chewing on his bottom lip. “I can... I should leave–”

“No,” Nancy cut in sharply. He looked at her, eyebrows furrowed, and she sighed. “I don’t want you to leave.”

Steve frowned at her, clearly confused.

“The thing is, I’m really happy you’re happy,” Nancy said slowly, looking at him carefully. “I’m really happy you feel at home here. I’m glad you’re finally connecting with Mike, and I love that Holly loves you, and I’m glad you have some weird friendship with my mom. I’m glad you have all this, I just hate that my family’s the first people you get this with. I hate that you think my parents are perfect just

because they care about you. It shouldn't be that way."

Steve was staring at her, looking at a loss for words. He swallowed and looked to the window, blinking rapidly. Nancy wondered in sudden shock if he was going to cry.

"That isn't your problem, though," Steve pointed out, voice slightly strangled. He cleared his throat, and his voice sounded more normal when he continued. "My family isn't your problem to fix, you don't have to be unhappy just to make me feel better."

"You're my boyfriend," she countered. "Your happiness is my problem. When you love someone, their happiness is your problem and your concern, and I'm not going to throw that under the bus just because I'm being dramatic."

Steve was staring at her with parted lips, and Nancy's brain struggled to keep up.

"When you love someone?" He asked, a smile pulling at his lips. Nancy's eyes widened as she realized that she'd never actually said that before. She'd told Mike, she'd told Jonathan, but she'd never, not once, told Steve to his face.

"I- I mean..." she tripped over her words for a moment before she finally stopped and nodded. "Yeah. I love you. Even when you annoy the shit out of me."

The smile Steve had been trying to contain broke through, and Nancy found that despite her stress and anxiety, she couldn't help but return it. "I love you too, Nance."

Nancy gave a small laugh, slightly embarrassed. "I know," she pointed out. "You say it a lot."

"I mean it a lot." Steve didn't miss a beat, still smiling at her. They smiled at each other for a long moment before Steve sobered up.

"You're wrong, you know," Steve pointed out, voice strangely light. "Some of this was my fault. I mean, I did manipulate your parents into letting me stay here."

Nancy let out a shaky breath, a laugh hidden underneath. "I know. I kinda hated you for that."

Steve grimaced. "Yeah, I sorta figured that out. I knew you didn't really want me here, I just- I figured it was because of your parents or something. I was a dick though, I'm sorry."

"It's okay," she replied honestly. "We were both kind of stupid."

"I know your family's not perfect, you know," Steve drawled, looking at her with a small smirk. Nancy raised her eyebrows. "Your mom uses canned beans in her casserole. Also I've seen the Reagan sign in your front yard."

Nancy laughed, a smile crossing over her features and she leaned into his side, feeling grateful when he wrapped his arms around her in a hug. "I'm sorry I was being selfish. Please don't leave."

"And miss out on Meatloaf Mondays?" Steve asked, horror in his voice. "You couldn't kick me out if you tried."

Nancy smiled, leaning against him closer.

"But seriously, if you ever just want me to leave or something... you can tell me. I'll understand." Steve said honestly, meeting her eyes. "This is your house first and foremost. You don't have to run to Jonathan's or the library just to get away from me."

Nancy smiled genuinely, kissing him on the cheek. She didn't bother wasting time with false reassurances that that would never happen. She didn't need to.

"Maybe we could just actually go to the movies this weekend," she suggested, chuckling slightly. "Just us. Not a family movie night."

He blinked, confused, before a look of realization crossed over his face. "That was a really stupid thing to suggest, wasn't it?"

"Just a bit," she teased. "I mean unless you'd rather keep hanging out with my family."

"I'd rather hang out with you." He laughed, kissing her neck gently,

and she smiled. After a second he pulled back. "There's still nothing good playing."

Nancy raised her eyebrows. "You know, I think we can find a way to entertain ourselves," she pointed out before leaning in to kiss him. He grinned against her lips, pulling her close as he kissed her back.

They stayed that way for a while, and Nancy reveled in the feeling of his lips against hers. It was strange, but they hadn't made out this way in forever, not since most of their time together was in the presence of her family. She'd missed this more than she'd like to admit.

"It's late," Steve muttered as he broke away from her several minutes later "I should get to the basement."

Nancy shook her head before her common sense kicked in. "My parents are already asleep. Just... stay here."

Steve looked unsure. "I don't wanna get you in trouble..."

"You won't," Nancy assured him. "I promise. I just- I missed falling asleep next to you."

It was hands down the corniest thing she'd ever said, and she made a face immediately after, but Steve looked like she'd just made his whole week, and she supposed that was worth it.

A loud knock woke her up early the next morning. She groaned and turned over in bed, pressing her forehead against a pillow that seemed harder than usual.

"Mom's gonna wake up soon, so unless you wanna be grounded for the next ten years tell your boyfriend to go back to the couch," Mike's annoying voice rang out, loud enough for her to hear but still quiet as to not be heard from downstairs.

Nancy frowned, wondering what the hell he was going on about before she realized she was pressing her face into Steve's chest. She

pulled back, looking at Steve who was smiling at her.

“Good morning, Sleeping Beauty,” he teased, pulling at a strand of her tangled hair. “Your hair kinda looks like a rat nest.

“Whatever, Prince Charming,” she threw back, yawning as she sat up. “Your hair kinda looks like the rat.”

Steve laughed, kissing her cheek firmly before slipping out of bed. “See you at breakfast.”

As it turned out, their parents weren't anywhere close to awake. Nancy was amused, wondering what time they actually got in last night. Her and Mike sat comfortably at the table, eating an easy breakfast of fruit and toast.

“I think... I think El wants me to kiss her again.”

Nancy snorted into her tea, looking at her brother with wide eyes. “What?” She asked, unable to keep the laughter out of her voice.

Mike made a face, chewing on his lip. “I dunno, she just keeps looking at me all weird. And yesterday she tried leaning towards me and I fell out of my chair.”

Nancy giggled at that, taking a moment to relish in her brother's dorkiness. “Jesus, Mike. Just kiss her. Unless you don't want to—”

“I do!” Mike cut in, his ears turning red. “I just don't want to do it wrong. What if I mess it up?”

“You can't do it wrong. Just do what you think feels right. It's not that hard.” Nancy assured him, messing with the teabag in her mug. She still found this conversation hilarious, but she was also glad he trusted her with this information.

“What's not that hard?” Mike jumped as Steve walked into the kitchen behind him. He was dressed by now, and his hair was less crazy, but Nancy noted with a strange sense of pride that it wasn't as

perfect as usual. Nancy snorted at Mike's unease.

"Um..." Mike started, looking at Nancy unsurely. Nancy shrugged, leaving the decision up to him. "I just... think I'm gonna. Kiss El."

Steve raised his eyebrows at Nancy who let out a small chuckle. He looked back down at Mike. "Good for you, kid. Go for it."

Mike sighed, looking back down at the table. There was a pause in which Steve and Nancy kept eye contact. Nancy raised her eyebrows challengingly, waiting for him to say something encouraging.

"Do you..." Steve started unsurely. Nancy had to laugh at how out of his element he looked right then. "Do you want tips or something?"

Both Wheelers pulled faces of disgust.

"Thanks, but I really don't want to know any more details about how you kiss my sister," Mike replied and Steve made a face too.

"Well look, don't worry about it." Steve sat down in between them at the table. "Kissing's just about being close to someone. And El's not going to judge you. It's El. Besides, if you're scared of kissing someone because you think they're going to humiliate you... those aren't the people you need to be kissing."

Nancy watched happily as Mike's shoulders relaxed. He nodded as he stared thoughtfully at the table. "Yeah... yeah, I guess so. Thanks."

He changed the subject, beginning to talk about his upcoming book report, but Nancy took a moment to kick Steve's legs lightly under the table. He met her eyes questioningly and she gave him a proud smile.

Good job, she tried to convey. He smiled back, clearly pleased, before looking back at the younger boy.

Maybe it wasn't the worst thing if Steve was part of the family.

When a knock on the door rang out during the middle of dinner and Ted got up to answer it, Steve had been living with them for exactly eleven days.

“Hello?” Nancy heard her father speak in the background.

“Hello, I’m Steve’s father. I believe he’s here?”

The content feeling that had been blooming in Nancy’s chest was extinguished quickly. Steve had stopped eating, looking over towards the front door with wide eyes. Something about that sight made Nancy’s stomach turn.

Her mother looked at her in concern, but she was already pushing herself out of her seat and making her way to the front door. She stopped beside her father, looking outside.

She’d met Sean Harrington about once before, very briefly, but he still looked just as stern and collected as he had then. Nancy glanced sideways at her dad, who looked unsure. After a second, he gave a resigned smile.

“Well why don’t you come in?”

Despite Nancy’s instincts screaming at her to just shut the door before this man ruined everything, she found herself following her dad’s lead and stepping back.

Sean Harrington stepped into the house. He looked out of place in the home, just as Nancy felt out of place in his house. He looked too big, too powerful to be standing inside, even though he wasn’t an inch taller than his son.

Nancy heard footsteps and looked back to see Steve and Karen walk over to them. Steve stopped beside Nancy, hand slipping into hers like second nature.

“Hey Dad,” he greeted, voice quieter than it should ever be, in Nancy’s opinion.

“Stephen,” his dad responded with a nod. He didn’t take his eyes off of his son. “Could we have a moment to ourselves, please?”

Nancy immediately tightened her grip on Steve's hand. She barely managed to keep herself from replying immediate, a strong no on the tip of her tongue.

Steve squeezed her hand back and when he looked at him he nodded. He didn't look happy, but he also didn't look scared or upset, so she figured it would be okay.

The Wheelers excused themselves into the dining room as the Harringtons walked towards the living room, out of hearing range.

"Is Steve leaving?" Mike asked quietly when Nancy sat back down. She shrugged in response.

They waited patiently, not saying a word, for several minutes until they heard footsteps leading back into the room. Steve came into the room, hands in his pockets, as his dad waited behind him. The Wheelers all stared at him expectantly. Both Nancy and Karen got to their feet.

"So. I'm gonna go home." Steve shrugged as he spoke the words, mouth twisted in a sort of resigned smile.

She knew the words were coming, but she still felt crushed by them. Despite that, she nodded sadly, swallowing. She glanced behind him to Mr. Harrington, who was standing stiffly by the door. His eyes flickered to his son.

"I'll be out in the car," he said with a firm nod before redirecting his attention to the other adults. "Thank you again for having him. I'm sorry if he gave you any trouble."

Karen shook her head quickly. "It was our pleasure."

Ted nodded. "You've got quite a son."

Sean hummed and Nancy felt her chest burn at the unsatisfied look in his eyes. She looked at Steve, but he didn't even seem to notice, still smiling over at her parents.

"Nice meeting you," Sean Harrington said in a farewell before exiting the house.

Nancy walked to her boyfriend. She laced her fingers through Steve's, looking at him with a concerned frown. She knew before she'd been eager to see the end of Steve's run as a honorary Wheeler, but it felt wrong like this. He looked at her, face open and waiting.

"Are you sure you're gonna be okay?" She asked, her voice quiet and sad.

Steve gave her a small smile. "Yeah. I mean, he came looking for me. That's a good sign right? I didn't think he'd do that."

Nancy wanted to argue and point out that it was just a testament to the type of person Sean Harrington was that Steve didn't even expect him to be missed by his father, but Steve looked hopeful and trusting. She didn't want to take that away from him. Besides, Steve had far more experience with his parents than Nancy did. If he said this was a good sign, then it was.

Steve must have sensed her unease, and he raised their joint hands up to press a kiss to her fingers. She nodded, understanding the unspoken I'll be fine in that gesture.

"Well if you ever need to get away for a night, you always have a place here, Steve," Karen cut in, crossing over to them. Steve turned to her, smiling widely as she pulled him into a hug.

"Thanks Karen," he said happily as he hugged her back. "And, uh, thanks for all the snacks too."

When he pulled away, Karen brushed a piece of his hair into place, an affectionate gesture of goodwill. Steve turned to Ted, who was waiting by the door. "Uh, thanks for letting me crash here, Mr. Wheeler."

He met Ted's outstretched hand in a firm shake, and Ted nodded at him with a small smile. "You're a good kid, you know. I'm glad Nancy knows you."

Steve glanced at her, and she didn't even have the heart to be embarrassed by the comment. "Me too."

"See ya Mike," Steve said, looking over the table to Mike, who looked

a bit sad as he watched the scene. “Call if you ever want a ride to school.”

Mike nodded, giving a small smile. “Thanks, Steve.”

Steve smiled around at all of them. “Thanks again. See you at school, Nancy.”

Nancy nodded, offering a small smile, and Steve took that as his cue to leave.

The door shut behind him, and the Wheeler’s were quiet for a long moment. Nancy felt like everyone was looking at her, but she just frowned at the door. Something pulled at Nancy’s chest, and before she knew it she was pulling open the door again and jogging out, pulling her sweater tightly around her.

“Steve, wait!” She called. He paused in the middle of the sidewalk at turned back to her, head cocked in confusion and amusement. She could see his father sitting in his car on the road, but she didn’t pay him any mind. Instead she jogged until she was standing right in front of Steve, and stood on her tiptoes to kiss him on the cheek.

“Look, at the end of the month, my family’s going to the aquarium,” she explained quickly, keeping eye contact. “We do it every year for my dad’s birthday, and... well, do you want to come with us?”

Steve frowned at her, giving a sad smile. “Nancy, come on, you don’t have to invite me to stuff—”

“It wouldn’t be a big deal,” she interrupted with a wave of her hand. “I mean, Lucas and his family are probably gonna join us, and it’s... I mean, it’s supposed to be the whole family, you know?”

She looked at him intently, pressing her lips together as she waited for him to respond. He blinked a few times before smiling. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” she replied, giving a small nod. She laughed lightly. “I mean, it’s not like we let anyone join in our Wheeler Family Game Nights.”

Steve laughed and wrapped his arms around her waist, neutralizing some of the cold from the air. “You mean the night I kicked your ass

in Scrabble?”

Nancy rolled her eyes but leaned into his embrace. She remembered how annoyed she'd been when he'd won, but now she could only remember the experience fondly. “You're just lucky you were on a team with my mom and not my idiot brother. I'll destroy you next time.”

“Can't wait,” Steve said with a grin. He leaned down and kissed her sweetly, a moment that was unfortunately ruined by a car honk in the background.

“STEPHEN!” Sean Harrington yelled impatiently. Steve huffed but pulled away obediently.

“I should probably go before he kicks me out for real,” he drawled.

Nancy nodded and stepped back. “You'll call if you need anything, right?”

“I'm going to my house, not to military camp,” Steve said with a laugh before it slipped into a happy smile. “See you tomorrow.”

“See you,” she repeated quickly, biting her lip to hold back a smile. “Goodnight.”

She turned back to the house, unsurprised to see her whole family standing in the doorway watching. Mike rolled his eyes, mouthing gross as he turned back inside, and her father looked slightly uncomfortable and he shook his head at her. Her mother had her eyebrows raised and lips pursed as if to hold back a smile.

“That boy really loves you, you know,” Karen said quietly as Nancy came back inside, locking the door behind her.

Nancy felt her chest warm even though her arms were still covered in goosebumps from the cold air. “Yeah, I know.”

Author's Note:

If you enjoyed it, please please comment. It really means the world to me. Thank you <3